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Ernest's Reality **Istook** Presses Varied Health Reforms

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ERNEST **Istook's** long-standing efforts to take federal health care policy in a better direction are apparently bearing fruit.

U.S. Rep. **Istook**, R-Oklahoma City, gained the support of Tommy Thompson, the new U.S. secretary of health and human services, for efforts to make health care more available and more affordable, to increase medical research - including here in Oklahoma - and to promote teen abstinence.

Istook has pressed for health care cost studies, including the impact of new medical discoveries. Thompson shares concerns about relatively stingy federal payments for hospitals and nursing homes in Oklahoma.

Every member of Oklahoma's congressional delegation has in one way or another supported efforts to increase federal funding for medical research here and in certain other states, with **Istook** playing a particularly notable role. Steady efforts have boosted research funding for short-changed states such as ours to \$ 100 million a year. Once, half of all medical research grants were going to just five states, with most of the rest going to another 21 states. Now, the other half of the states are getting a modestly larger share of the revenue stream. As a result, federal financing for places like the Oklahoma Health Center is steadily growing.

Thompson also backs abstinence education. Despite the wrath of well-organized interests, **Istook** has strongly supported such programs, and Thompson shares his objectives. This editorial page encourages **Istook** and all advocates of abstinence education to study Project Reality, a successful program working with public school youngsters in Chicago and other communities.

Last week, **Istook** said, "These are efforts for the federal government to support our values, rather than undercut them. Federal funds for too long were used in programs that lowered our standards; now we're turning the corner and starting to reinforce what most parents teach their children about waiting until marriage. And on medicine, we're making progress to correct the bias in federal formulas that have been unfair to Oklahoma. Medical research... is a major key to bringing more high-paying jobs to our state."

Istook should press on with the new administration. Members of the state delegation should continue to work together on vital medical initiatives to boost Oklahoma and promote mainstream moral values.

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